

trusted the government to persons even Jess capable of guarding the interests of the country. William of Wykcham had been, it was afterwards asserted, corrupt in an underhand way, but he was certainly not openly oppressive and extortionate. It was no improvement to give the nation over to the tender mercies of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster.

Besides the change of ministry, attacks were made in this Parliament on the enormous Church endowments which paid so little towards the heavy expenses of the war, and the budget of the year was drawn up so as to fall heavily on ecclesiastical property. A sum of 50,000*l.* was required. It was assumed that there were forty thousand parishes in England, and that if each should pay on the average 22*s.* 8*d.*, the requisite amount would be raised. Towards this tax all lands that had passed into Mortmain since Edward the First were now forced to contribute, and at the same time the tax voted by the clergy in convocation was extorted from small livings hitherto exempted. In these proceedings we see the beginning of that organised political movement for disendowment of the Church and abolition of her privileges which was the one point of sympathy between the House of Commons and the Duke of Lancaster, and formed the chief connection of Wycliffe with political parties.¹

The Parliament broke up, and the lay ministers took over the government. The hopes of the nation were soon damped. In the first place, the budget had been hopelessly miscalculated. There were not forty thousand, but only nine thousand parishes in England. The ludicrousness of the mistake throws a lurid light on statistical knowledge in the Middle Ages. That the assembled Estates of a great country should agree in solemn conclave that there were forty thousand parishes in the realm when there were only nine thousand, would scarcely command our belief if it were not written in the Book of the Bolls of Parliament. Probably the outgoing ministers, since each knew approximately the number of parishes in his diocese, had some suspicion of the truth, but did not feel bound to communicate their knowledge to rivals

¹ *Rot. Parl.*, ii. 803-4 ; *Wals.*, i. 812-5 ; *Fasc.* #., Introd, x*L